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EPA News Highlights 8.8.18

ABC News: EPA officials say rule would close the door on asbestos

The Environmental Protection Agency is moving forward on a proposal that would require companies to get EPA approval to manufacture and import asbestos, a move that officials say would "close the door" on uses for asbestos that could resume at any time under the current law. A rule proposed by the EPA says the agency has identified several areas where asbestos is no longer used, such as roofing materials, and would require that any company that wants to manufacture or import asbestos for that purpose has to notify the agency at least 90 days in advance. The uses for asbestos that the rule covers are not illegal. The EPA has banned some uses for asbestos, like spray-on insulation, but a ban on most products that contain asbestos proposed in 1989 was later overturned by a federal appeals court.

The Hill: EPA pushes back on asbestos criticisms

The Trump administration is pushing back against a rash of criticism that new Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) policies could lead to the import or manufacturing of asbestos. The controversy stems from a June 1 proposal that sought to require companies to notify the EPA if they planned to import or manufacture various out-of-date uses of asbestos, like roofing felt and floor tile. It led this week to a firestorm, with news stories, denunciations and well-known figures like Chelsea Clinton and Sen. Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii) charging that the EPA is opening the door to asbestos — something the agency strongly refutes.

CNN: EPA says it's strengthening asbestos regulation, not gutting it

The Environmental Protection Agency says that, contrary to recent reports, it is moving to close a loophole on asbestos, rather than expand the ways the deadly chemical can be used. An agency official pointed to two asbestos-related policy announcements made by the agency this summer -- including a rarely-used process called "significant new use rule," or SNUR -- and said they create "a regulatory backstop where none has existed before." "The SNUR is really a good news story for public health protection," said Nancy Beck, a scientist and the deputy assistant administrator for EPA's chemical program. Critics of the agency's move say it could have done more, including an outright ban on the use and importation of asbestos.

KRDO: EPA hosts forum about contaminated water in Security-Widefield

The Environmental Protection Agency held a forum Tuesday night to discuss the per-fluorinated chemicals (PFC's) contaminating the water in Security-Widefield and Fountain. It's thought the chemicals came from years of firefighting training at Peterson Air Force Base. This is the third forum held by the EPA across the country in recent weeks. The idea is to learn about the impact PFC's are having in affected communities and how the agency can help better address the problem. "What we learn today will be developed into a national action plan which will outline what changes may happen next," said Sarah Bahram, the EPA's director of safe drinking water.

The Daily Caller: EPA Calls Freakout Over Asbestos Rule Fake News

The EPA is pushing back against numerous "inaccurate" media reports claiming the agency is etching out new rules effectively legalizing all forms of asbestos production. Multiple reports suggesting the agency is giving manufacturers the go-ahead with asbestos production appears to be grossly overblown, according to the federal registry. The EPA is tightening regulatory scrutiny on new uses of the chemical, which is heavily restricted but not banned in the U.S. "The press reports on this issue are inaccurate," EPA spokesman James Hewitt told The Daily Caller News Foundation. "Without the proposed Significant New Use Rule (SNUR) EPA would not have a regulatory basis to restrict manufacturing and processing for the new asbestos uses covered by the rule."

The Argus Observer: EPA to oversee state's injection wells program

Idaho's oil and gas industry may soon have a lower-cost option for disposing of production wastewater. On July 30, the Environmental Protection Agency issued its final rule transferring primacy for Idaho's Class II Underground Injection Control (UIC) program to EPA. Idaho formally requested the transfer last year. Until now, Idaho producers have been unable to apply for a permit to inject their wastewater, which typically involves utilizing a well that was drilled for gas and oil production. After the state legislature removed a ban on Class II injection wells in 2013, the Idaho Department of Water Resources failed to receive EPA approval of the state's program for Class II wells. Finally, IDWR asked EPA to assume that regulatory role for Idaho.

National News Highlights 8.8.18

Reuters: U.S. Congressman Collins, son charged with insider trading

Christopher Collins, a Republican U.S. congressman from New York who was one of President Donald Trump's earliest supporters, was criminally charged on Wednesday with taking part in an insider trading scheme involving an Australian biotechnology company on whose board he served. The indictment came as Collins, 68, was seeking a fourth two-year term in November's elections, where Democrats hope to recapture the House of Representatives. "These charges are a reminder that this is a nation of laws, and that everybody stands equal before the bar of justice," U.S. Attorney Geoffrey Berman said at a news conference in Manhattan.

Politico: U.S. sanctions Russia over nerve agent poisoning

The Trump administration will hit Russia with new sanctions over the attempted assassination in Britain of a former Kremlin spy. The State Department made the announcement Wednesday after concluding on Aug. 6 that Russia used a banned nerve agent, Novichok, to try and kill the ex-spy, Sergei Skripal, according to spokeswoman Heather Nauert. Nauert said a U.S. investigation found Moscow had "used chemical or biological weapons in violation of international law or has used lethal chemical or biological weapons against its own nationals." Skripal, a retired Russian military intelligence officer, and his daughter, Yulia Skripal, were found unconscious in the English city of Salisbury on March 4. United Kingdom authorities said the two had been poisoned with a nerve agent that they believed was produced in Russia.

ABC News

EPA officials say rule would close the door on asbestos

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/activists-epa-rule-ban-asbestos/story?id=57090547>

By Stephanie Ebbs, 8/8/2018

The Environmental Protection Agency is moving forward on a proposal that would require companies to get EPA approval to manufacture and import asbestos, a move that officials say would "close the door" on uses for asbestos that could resume at any time under the current law.

A rule proposed by the EPA says the agency has identified several areas where asbestos is no longer used, such as roofing materials, and would require that any company that wants to manufacture or import asbestos for that purpose has to notify the agency at least 90 days in advance.

The uses for asbestos that the rule covers are not illegal. The EPA has banned some uses for asbestos, like spray-on insulation, but a ban on most products that contain asbestos proposed in 1989 was later overturned by a federal appeals court.

Many companies voluntarily stopped using the products, but Nancy Beck, deputy assistant administrator in the EPA chemical safety office, said without the rule they could start using them again at any time.

"We're really closing the door on those uses that are not happening now, but there's nothing preventing them from starting," Beck told ABC News.

Beck said that even though asbestos is no longer used for things like floor tiles, wrapping pipe, or roofing materials there is nothing to stop companies from resuming using those materials that include asbestos at any time.

"If somebody wanted to start doing it there's nothing preventing them. So we wanted to sort of look at the whole landscape and make sure that if anyone started a use we would be able to evaluate it," she said.

But advocates say the rule still opens the door to give some companies that approval and that the EPA should ban asbestos completely because of the health risks.

Breathing asbestos can increase the risk of lung cancer, according to the Centers for Disease Control, and people who work with asbestos are even more likely to develop lung problems. A campaign by the Environmental Working Group says that between 12,000 and 15,000 Americans die from asbestos-related illnesses every year.

That group also pointed out last month that a Russian company that is one of the world's biggest asbestos producers stamped President Donald Trump's face on its palettes of asbestos and posted on Facebook thanking him and former EPA administrator Scott Pruitt for excluding some uses of asbestos from the agency's risk assessment. Melanie Benesh, legislative attorney for the Environmental Working Group, said the EPA is not considering the impact of exposure to asbestos from old buildings or health effects other than cancer in its analysis under the toxic chemicals law passed in 2016. She said the EPA is behind other developed countries by not banning asbestos and that its a "very big public health concern" if the agency is limiting the scope of its risk evaluation in a way that makes it more likely to find less risk associated with asbestos.

"Asbestos is a carcinogen regardless of whether it's in building material that was installed 40 years ago or whether it's in a newly manufactured product," she said. "Cancer doesn't distinguish between these two uses so when EPA is evaluating asbestos we think they should take a comprehensive look."

On Tuesday, Chelsea Clinton tweeted an article about the EPA proposal in The Architects Newspaper that reported the EPA rule allowed asbestos in construction materials, which EPA spokesman James Hewitt said was inaccurate, commenting that the Trump administration is "making asbestos great again."

Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization President Linda Reinstein tweeted that the proposal was "shocking" and "disgusting" and said it would increase asbestos imports to the U.S.

EPA officials pushed back on this criticism, saying that the chemical law passed in 2016 requires them to go through a risk evaluation process before they completely ban chemicals like asbestos. They said the rule does not encourage asbestos use at all but puts a rigorous review process in place where there previously wasn't any regulation.

"The uses that are covered in the significant new use rule can come to market prior to the SNUR being proposed at any time with no knowledge, no evaluation," Charlotte Bertrand, acting principal assistant administrator in the EPA chemical office told ABC News. "The SNUR prohibits that from happening, it cannot happen, and if somebody did want to go to market they have to notify the EPA and EPA evaluates the use that is being proposed for human health, public health, and environmental risk, and then it enables an opportunity to impose restrictions, prohibit, or limit a use that could happen now."

The full text of the EPA rule proposed on June 1 [is available here](#) for public comment until Aug. 10.

The Hill

EPA pushes back on asbestos criticisms

<http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/400966-epa-pushes-back-on-asbestos-criticisms>

By Timothy Cama, 8/8/2018

The Trump administration is pushing back against a rash of criticism that new Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) policies could lead to the import or manufacturing of asbestos.

The controversy stems from a June 1 proposal that sought to require companies to notify the EPA if they planned to import or manufacture various out-of-date uses of asbestos, like roofing felt and floor tile.

It led this week to a firestorm, with news stories, denunciations and well-known figures like Chelsea Clinton and Sen. Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii) charging that the EPA is opening the door to asbestos — something the agency strongly refutes.

The EPA is pushing back with a PR blitz through interviews, social media and a fact sheet.

Nancy Beck, a deputy associate administrator in the EPA's chemical safety office, characterized the proposal, dubbed a significant new use rule (SNUR), as a ban, since the EPA would evaluate the risk before any manufacturing or imports are allowed and stop it if needed.

"By doing the SNUR, if someone wants to start the manufacturing and processing, if we find risk, we can prevent it," said Beck, who worked at the American Chemistry Council, an industry group, before then-EPA head Scott Pruitt hired her last year.

Nonetheless, health advocates are concerned.

While they don't agree with news reports that have characterized the EPA as opening the floodgates to asbestos, they say that the agency's actions aren't as protective as they should be.

Alongside the June 1 proposal, the EPA proposed a list of uses for asbestos that would go through the risk evaluation process, which can lead to total bans. Advocates want the EPA to include the outdated uses in the risk evaluations, so that they could be banned as well — not just subject to the SNUR process that gives the EPA significant discretion.

"It's reasonably foreseen that a longstanding or significant use of a chemical that has been phased out could reenter commerce if there's no legal bar against it," said Liz Hitchcock, acting executive director of Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families, a coalition of groups advocating for stronger chemical regulation.

EPA's proposal to require notifications for reviving outdated uses is a "decent stopgap tool," Hitchcock said, but "it's not the permanent ban that we need to protect public health."

At the root of the issue is a deep distrust by environmentalists, health advocates and the left of the Trump administration's environmental policies. Former EPA head Scott Pruitt repeatedly sought to ease rules for regulated companies, and Andrew Wheeler, his successor, has pledged to continue the agenda.

It's possible past remarks by President Trump also fueled skepticism about the EPA's intentions.

"If we didn't remove incredibly powerful fire retardant asbestos & replace it with junk that doesn't work, the World Trade Center would never have burned down," he tweeted in 2012. In his 1997 book "Art of the Comeback," he speculated that the mob had led efforts to stop its use.

Asbestos is currently not banned by the federal government, although it is almost never used in ways that would expose people to it. Officials have known for decades that asbestos causes illnesses like lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis.

The EPA tried to implement a sweeping ban in 1989 under the Toxic Substances Control Act. But the industry sued and a court overturned most of the ban.

Asbestos then became the poster child for federal inaction on dangerous chemicals, leading to the near-unanimous passage in 2016 of the Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act, which, among other things, sought to make it easier for the EPA to ban known harmful chemicals.

Recent stories in Fast Company and Architects Newspaper claimed that the EPA's SNUR rule effectively approved the use of the carcinogenic mineral in manufacturing and imports.

"Experts who have looked at [the document] have said that in the end, it pretty much gives EPA discretion to do whatever it wants," Bill Walsh, board president of the Healthy Building Network, told Fast Company.

The reports went viral, spurring the commentary from Clinton, Schatz and others.

That's led the EPA to push back with a PR blitz through interviews, social media and a fact sheet.

The agency says what it's doing on asbestos is the most aggressive federal action against the chemical in decades, carrying out Congress's instructions to significantly reduce exposure to it and ban its uses.

"I'm completely confused by the press that thinks that there's something wrong here. But in many ways, this is a very good news story," said Beck.

As for the calls for more aggressive actions against out-of-date applications asbestos such as roofing and pipeline wrap, EPA argues that it doesn't have the authority to regulate legacy uses of chemicals like asbestos before it knows that they are coming back into use.

"If nobody is manufacturing asbestos for building materials, we have no authority to prohibit it," Beck said, as an example.

Environmental and health groups, led largely by the Environmental Defense Fund, have already filed lawsuits against the EPA over two regulations it wrote to implement the 2016 chemical rule, and they're likely to file more.

CNN

EPA says it's strengthening asbestos regulation, not gutting it

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/08/politics/epa-asbestos-regulation/index.html>

By Gregory Wallace and Sara Ganim, 8/8/2018

The Environmental Protection Agency says that, contrary to recent reports, it is moving to close a loophole on asbestos, rather than expand the ways the deadly chemical can be used.

An agency official pointed to two asbestos-related policy announcements made by the agency this summer -- including a rarely-used process called "significant new use rule," or SNUR -- and said they create "a regulatory backstop where none has existed before."

"The SNUR is really a good news story for public health protection," said Nancy Beck, a scientist and the deputy assistant administrator for EPA's chemical program.

Critics of the agency's move say it could have done more, including an outright ban on the use and importation of asbestos.

Beck's comments to CNN followed a series of reports -- including in a business news publication and an architectural trade newspaper -- that the agency was weakening protections on the chemical and was opening up a process for taking applications to use asbestos in more than a dozen ways, such as adhesive, roofing material and floor tile.

While the proposed rule does create that process, Beck pointed out those uses are currently legal -- meaning the regulation actually will restrict the allowable uses of asbestos.

Asbestos occurs naturally, and miners extract its long fibers that have been used to strengthen cement, filter chemicals like chlorine and hold together materials like insulation. Exposure and inhalation is linked to mesothelioma and other cancers. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data from 2017 shows around 3,000 people die annually of mesothelioma.

EPA regulation of asbestos dates back to a 1970s chemical law and a series of regulations crafted by the agency and other governmental bodies. In 1989, EPA recognized the health hazards and largely banned asbestos, but grandfathered in ways the chemical was still being used at the time. That ban was largely overturned by a federal court. Over the last 30 years, industries -- seeing cancer deaths and the lawsuits that ensued -- largely phased asbestos out of their manufacturing and products.

A 2016 amendment to the 1970s chemical law required the EPA to periodically review chemicals and their hazards, and gave the agency new authority to restrict or ban chemicals. Agency officials then looked at the grandfathered exceptions, determined which are no longer in use and worked to close the loophole, Beck said.

"None of these uses are banned today ... but nothing prevents them from coming back to market," she said, explaining why the EPA took action.

Betsy Southerland, a former EPA scientist who resigned over the Trump administration's leadership of the agency, said the rule was intended to be broader when the bipartisan legislation was crafted during the Obama administration.

"The original plan for the asbestos significant new use rule was for the rule to list the known ongoing uses of asbestos and then state that any other use an industry might want to initiate in the future" would require EPA review, she told CNN.

She said an "open ended" approach would better protect people, because "there is no way EPA can claim to know today every possible new use industry might want in the future."

The Environmental Working Group, which supports a full ban on asbestos, said the agency is not performing a strong enough assessment of the chemical's hazards.

"We're very concerned that EPA is taking a lot of shortcuts in that risk evaluation," said Melanie Benesh, a legislative attorney who works on toxic chemical issues at EWG.

"There is lots of asbestos still out in the environment, particularly in older homes and schools," she said, and the agency's assessment processes does not take into account those legacy uses.

KRDO

EPA hosts forum about contaminated water in Security-Widefield

<https://www.krdo.com/news/colorado-springs/epa-hosts-forum-about-contaminated-water-in-security-widefield/778758857>

By Stephanie Sierra, 8/7/2018

The Environmental Protection Agency held a forum Tuesday night to discuss the per-fluorinated chemicals (PFC's) contaminating the water in Security-Widefield and Fountain.

It's thought the chemicals came from years of firefighting training at Peterson Air Force Base.

This is the third forum held by the EPA across the country in recent weeks. The idea is to learn about the impact PFC's are having in affected communities and how the agency can help better address the problem.

"What we learn today will be developed into a national action plan which will outline what changes may happen next," said Sarah Bahram, the EPA's director of safe drinking water.

"I think we've heard clearly that folks want the EPA to regulate PFC's in drinking water," she said.

Bahram said regulating will require establishing a maximum contaminant limit.

Families from across the state filled the conference room at Hotel Elegante in Colorado Springs.

"I want them to fix whatever they did," said Steve Patterson, who used to live in Security.

Patterson said nearly 20 of his family members who lived in the affected areas now have cancer.

"Everybody in our family that lived in that area ended up with cancer, but everyone who lives outside that area did not," he said.

Unfortunately, Patterson's story is not uncommon. Which is why many people supported the request to regulate a maximum contaminant limit of PFC's in water.

"Water is our life line and once it's polluted ... it's very hard to clean up," said Patience Paisley.

The forum continues Wednesday at 4 p.m. at Hotel Elegante in Colorado Springs.

The Daily Caller

EPA Calls Freakout Over Asbestos Rule Fake News

<http://dailycaller.com/2018/08/08/fake-news-epa-asbestos/>

By Chris White, 8/8/2018

The EPA is pushing back against numerous "inaccurate" media reports claiming the agency is etching out new rules effectively legalizing all forms of asbestos production.

Multiple reports suggesting the agency is giving manufacturers the go-ahead with asbestos production appears to be grossly overblown, according to the federal registry. The EPA is tightening regulatory scrutiny on new uses of the chemical, which is heavily restricted but not banned in the U.S.

"The press reports on this issue are inaccurate," EPA spokesman James Hewitt told The Daily Caller News Foundation. "Without the proposed Significant New Use Rule (SNUR) EPA would not have a regulatory basis to restrict manufacturing and processing for the new asbestos uses covered by the rule."

He was referring to what is called a Significant New Use Rule (or SNUR), a rule forcing manufacturers to notify the EPA if they intend on producing a product with chemicals from asbestos. The industry could produce and use asbestos for any reason save for the SNUR, according to the agency.

Hewitt added: "The EPA action would prohibit companies from manufacturing, importing, or processing for these new uses of asbestos unless they receive approval from EPA." The agency's new administrator, Andrew Wheeler, responded Wednesday with a similar complaint on Twitter.

"There have been some inaccurate media reports regarding @EPA's actions on asbestos," Wheeler tweeted to his followers. "The facts are @EPA is proposing a new rule that would allow for the restriction of asbestos manufacturing and processing of new uses of asbestos."

Online media outlet Fastrack Company reported in a July 31 article that "Trump's EPA has made it easier for companies to begin using asbestos again." The publication's author, Aileen Kwun, went on to highlight what she believes to be a parade of horrors if the agency degrades rules limiting the use of asbestos.

The U.S. restricts the use of the material, but it remains one of few developed nations that has refrained from banning asbestos outright. Activists have long-sought for an outright ban, according to Competitive Enterprise Institute analyst Angela Logomasini.

"A lot of uses of the dangerous types of asbestos were banned," Logomasini told TheDCNF, adding that asbestos containing short-fibers are regularly used to make car brakes and other important products. "The risks of brake failures would be much higher were it not for certain types of asbestos."

She noted that the EPA's SNUR rule make sense considering the considerable risk. "What the EPA is saying is that if you are going to do a new use, you need to come to us to check if it is something that will need tighter restrictions," Logomasini said. "The ones that we use now are very short fibers – doesn't mean they are not dangerous. Just means you can manage their risks easier."

Argus Observer

EPA officials say rule would close the door on asbestos

https://www.argusobserver.com/news/epa-to-oversee-state-s-injection-wells-program/article_2ee8c6f6-9b28-11e8-8719-0bd39f8c1b4d.html

By Rob Ruth, 8/8/2018

Idaho's oil and gas industry may soon have a lower-cost option for disposing of production wastewater.

On July 30, the Environmental Protection Agency issued its final rule transferring primacy for Idaho's Class II Underground Injection Control (UIC) program to EPA. Idaho formally requested the transfer last year.

Until now, Idaho producers have been unable to apply for a permit to inject their wastewater, which typically involves utilizing a well that was drilled for gas and oil production. After the state legislature removed a ban on Class II injection wells in 2013, the Idaho Department of Water Resources failed to receive EPA approval of the state's program for Class II wells. Finally, IDWR asked EPA to assume that regulatory role for Idaho.

According to officials with Idaho's Oil & Gas Conservation Commission (OGCC), Alta Mesa, Idaho's only current producer, has been trucking its wastewater from Payette County to an evaporation facility in Kuna, costing Alta Mesa around \$9 per barrel of wastewater.

At a July 18 town hall meeting in Payette hosted by OGCC, Payette County Commissioner Marc Shigeta, a member of the state oil and gas board, said the company still had plans for construction of its own evaporation facility in the local area.

Although EPA's final rule on the Class II UIC program was still unpublished on July 18, Mick Thomas, administrator for the Oil and Gas Division at the Idaho Department of Lands, told the audience that he believed that the transfer of primacy would indeed occur.

In answer to a question, Thomas and other oil and gas officials couldn't hazard a guess as to how quickly EPA would process applications for injection well permits, however.

EPA held a Jan. 8 public hearing in Boise on the proposed rule revision, a hearing the agency scheduled only in response to a formal request. Members of Citizens Allied for Integrity and Accountability (CAIA), a community group concerned with potential negative impacts from oil and gas drilling operations, were among those who raised issues at the hearing and during the public comment period.

With publication of its final rule, EPA reported having received "414 comments from 387 individual commenters,... Of these comments, only a minority were identified as containing material that was determined to be within the scope of the proposed rule revision," the agency stated.

Reuters

U.S. Congressman Collins, son charged with insider trading

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-congressman-insidertrading/u-s-says-new-york-congressman-collins-indicted-for-insider-trading-idUSKBN1KT1N1>

By Brendan Pierson, Jonathan Stempel 8/8/2018

Christopher Collins, a Republican U.S. congressman from New York who was one of President Donald Trump's earliest supporters, was criminally charged on Wednesday with taking part in an insider trading scheme involving an Australian biotechnology company on whose board he served.

The indictment came as Collins, 68, was seeking a fourth two-year term in November's elections, where Democrats hope to recapture the House of Representatives.

"These charges are a reminder that this is a nation of laws, and that everybody stands equal before the bar of justice," U.S. Attorney Geoffrey Berman said at a news conference in Manhattan.

Two lawyers for Collins, Jonathan Barr and Jonathan New, said in a statement that they were confident he would be "completely vindicated and exonerated."

The indictment charged Collins, his son Cameron, and Stephen Zarsky, the father of Cameron Collins' fiancée, with securities fraud, wire fraud and other crimes.

"We intend to mount a vigorous defense on behalf of our client," Tom Hanusik and Rebecca Ricigliano, lawyers for Cameron Collins, said in a statement. Amanda Bassen, a lawyer for Zarsky, declined to comment.

All three defendants pleaded not guilty on Wednesday before U.S. District Judge Vernon Broderick in Manhattan, and were expected to be released on bail.

The case relates to Innate Immunotherapeutics Ltd (IIL.AX), where Christopher Collins sat on the board and held a 16.8 percent stake.

Prosecutors said that in June 2017, while attending the congressional picnic at the White House, Collins learned in an email from Innate's chief executive that a trial for its proposed secondary multiple sclerosis drug MIS416 had failed.

According to the indictment, Collins immediately called his son and told him the news. Cameron Collins in turn told his fiancée, her parents and a friend, and Stephen Zarsky went on to tip his brother, his sister and a friend, the indictment said.

Christopher Collins did not trade his own Innate stock, which lost millions of dollars in value, according to the indictment. Prosecutors said the congressman was "virtually precluded" from trading in part because he already faced a congressional ethics probe over Innate.

However, prosecutors said others used the insider information to avoid more than \$768,000 in losses when Innate's share price plunged on news of the drug trial's failure.

Sydney-based Innate did not immediately respond to a request for comment outside business hours.

Collins represents New York's solidly Republican 27th Congressional District, and nonpartisan analysts predict he will win re-election. The district includes areas surrounding Buffalo and Rochester.

Last October, the Office of Congressional Ethics reported that it had "substantial reason" to believe Collins may have used his office to help Innate.

It voted unanimously to send its case to the House Ethics Committee. Collins denied wrongdoing.

Politico

U.S. sanctions Russia over nerve agent poisoning

<https://www.politico.com/story/2018/08/08/russia-sanctions-trump-nerve-agent-poisoning-767536>

By Rebecca Morin, 8/8/2018

The Trump administration will hit Russia with new sanctions over the attempted assassination in Britain of a former Kremlin spy.

The State Department made the announcement Wednesday after concluding on Aug. 6 that Russia used a banned nerve agent, Novichok, to try and kill the ex-spy, Sergei Skripal, according to spokeswoman Heather Nauert.

Nauert said a U.S. investigation found Moscow had "used chemical or biological weapons in violation of international law or has used lethal chemical or biological weapons against its own nationals."

Skripal, a retired Russian military intelligence officer, and his daughter, Yulia Skripal, were found unconscious in the English city of Salisbury on March 4. United Kingdom authorities said the two had been poisoned with a nerve agent that they believed was produced in Russia.

Yulia Skripal was released from the hospital in April after being treated for the nerve agent attack. Her father was discharged in May.

The sanctions are expected to take effect on or around Aug. 22.

A State Department official said the Kremlin was notified on Wednesday afternoon about the sanctions, and U.S. allies have also been notified as well.

The conclusion of the U.S. investigation comes several months after U.K. authorities reached a similar conclusion, accusing the Kremlin in April of breaking an international ban on chemical weapons.

The White House has already expelled 60 Russian diplomats from the U.S. over the poisoning.

Wednesday's announcement came several weeks after President Donald Trump held a one-on-one summit with Russian leader Vladimir Putin. Trump was criticized for now pressing Putin aggressive on several issues, such as election meddling, during a press conference after the meeting.

In the weeks since, the Trump administration has organized a briefing of top national security officials to call out Russia's ongoing attempts to spread disinformation in America and the State Department

Trump himself, however, has remained relatively silent regarding Russia's online trolling and had not commented on Twitter as of late Wednesday afternoon about the latest sanctions targeting Russia.

James Hewitt
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